

# building blocks



April 2006

The online newsletter of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority  
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## Habitat for Humanity of Michigan Names MSHDA 2005 Sponsor of the Year

A special partnership between MSHDA and Habitat dating back to the early 1990's was the basis for Habitat's selection of the Authority for the 2005 Sponsor of the Year that was awarded to Executive Director Michael R. DeVos at the annual Michigan Awards Banquet at the Kellogg Center in East Lansing March 28. Keynote speaker, Craig

DeRoche, Speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives, presented the award.

Nancy Moody, Chair of the HFHM Banquet Committee, cited many reasons why the Authority was chosen as Sponsor of the Year.

"Since 1993, MSHDA has awarded almost \$25 million to Habitat for Humanity of Michi-

gan," Moody said. "In addition to MSHDA's generous financial support, Authority employees have contributed hundreds of hours of sweat equity and helped build hundreds of homes throughout the state for Habitat recipients."

According to DeVos, MSHDA's collaboration with HFHM is a shining example of a strong and successful partnership.

"Our partnership with Habitat has been very rewarding," said DeVos. "We have seen Habitat of Michigan flourish over the years, making them one of the largest and most thriving groups of affiliates in the nation."

Other awards presented went to Harbor Habitat for Humanity of Benton Harbor for Affiliate of the Year; Robert Spencer of Alcona County Habitat for Humanity for Volunteer of the Year; and legislative leaders State Representative Dianne Byrum, Senator Ken Sikkema and Senator Bob Emerson for Public Officials of the Year. The prestigious Bernice R. Bensen Service Award was presented to Melissa Yutzey Bourke of Kelley Cawthorne.



*Ken Bensen, President of Habitat for Humanity Michigan and MSHDA Executive Director Michael R. DeVos stand together at the Michigan Awards Banquet*

## Cities of Promise, Other Initiatives Taking Shape

**T**he two months since we last communicated have been fast-paced, eventful, but rewarding nonetheless, because our hard work is beginning to bear fruit. When we started the process to develop a unified five-year strategic plan that would serve the entire affordable housing community in Michigan, we didn't really know what it was going to look like. Now it is starting to take shape, and I hope you are as pleased as we are that we began this journey together nearly a year ago. We will be sharing your findings and recommendations and determining our next steps at the Affordable Housing Conference June 5-7. I hope to see you all there.

In the last issue of Building Blocks, we talked about a proposed new and exciting initiative called *Cities of Promise* that MSHDA is engaged in with Governor Granholm's office as well as a number of other state agencies and departments. **I'm delighted to be able to report that the initiative is now official and that the Governor is deeply committed to helping the seven communities in Michigan with the highest rates of poverty:** Benton Harbor, Detroit,

Flint, Hamtramck, Highland Park, Muskegon Heights, and Saginaw. We were actually in Flint last month with Governor Granholm for a groundbreaking ceremony announcing construction of a major mixed-use redevelopment project in downtown Flint. Congratulations to Kent Kukuk, a new MSHDA staff member from the CATeam that has been instrumental in this project from the very beginning. Governor Granholm plans to take her "Cabinet on the Road" to other *Cities of Promise* during the next several months and Detroit is scheduled for the next visit on May 9. Stay tuned for which project will be featured in the Detroit area.

Speaking of Detroit, our MSHDA Detroit office has been in the spotlight recently. Jackie Williams-Armstrong, formerly Director of the Housing Resource Fund in the Office of Community Development, has been promoted to Director of the Southeast Michigan Development division based in the Detroit office. Jackie and her staff will be marketing and raising public awareness for MSHDA programs in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, and Monroe Counties. Janet Irrer and



*Michael R. DeVos at the Flint Cities of Promise/groundbreaking event*

Sally Harrison of our new Supportive Housing and Homeless Initiatives division are working to set up a Housing Resource Center in Detroit where homeless people can go for housing assistance.

The search continues for a director of our Single Family division, as well as a manager for the Single Family Marketing Team. **We have, however, named a director of the Community Assistance Team (CATeam): Joseph Borgstrom, from the Shiawassee Regional Chamber of Commerce.** He most recently served as Director of the Shiawassee Economic Development Partnership. Many of you may know him from the MEDC, where he was once a member of the CATeam.

As we continue "working while planning" we have made every effort to stay focused on our mission of building communities while we improve the lives of Michigan's citizens who have the fewest housing options.

Look forward to seeing you all at the Michigan Conference on Affordable Housing June 5-7 at the Lansing Center.



*Gov. Jennifer Granholm speaks to reporters at the Cities of Promise event/groundbreaking ceremony in Flint. See next page for full story.*



# New Development in Flint Promises Bright Future

## Gov. Granholm on Hand to Kick Off Project

Flint residents will soon enjoy a major revitalization to their downtown in the form of a major mixed-use redevelopment project that includes loft living, office space, restaurants, a nightclub and a brewpub.

Groundbreaking ceremonies were held last month for the Rowe Inc./500 Project, located on Saginaw Street in downtown Flint.



*Inspired by New York's SOHO district, the Rowe Lofts feature 18-foot ceilings, gourmet kitchens and an open floor plan.*

Taking part in the event was Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who lauded the project as a vital step toward creating a vibrant, healthy downtown. MSHDA Executive Director Michael DeVos also attended.

The Rowe Building is one of the first projects to be developed under *Cities of Promise*, a governor's initiative that focuses on some of Michigan's most vulnerable cities. In the targeted

cities, which also include Benton Harbor, Detroit, Hamtramck, Highland Park, Muskegon Heights and Saginaw, city-specific partnerships are bringing together the best local resources with those of several state agencies, including MSHDA and the Department of Human Services as the lead organizations.

The Rowe Building will include new construction as well as the renovation of three existing buildings: the former Maas Brothers Department Store, Carlton's Stationers, and Jewelry World.

The second and third floors will be transformed into offices for Rowe Incorporated Corporate Headquarters. Themed restaurants will be located on the main level, a nightclub will occupy the basement, and eight loft apartments will fill up the fourth floor.

The loft-style apartments will range in size from 1,400 square feet to 2,500 square feet. Each of the apartments feature two-story lofts, large windows, hardwood floors, stainless steel appliances, washers and dryers and open floor plans.

The Rowe Building project is being developed by Uptown Developments LLC, a partnership of private investors from the Flint area. Rowe, Inc. is a local consulting firm, providing services including engineering, land aerial surveying, planning, landscape architecture, and wetland consultation to businesses and municipalities nationwide.

Expected completion date of the Rowe Building is January 2007. For more information, contact the Uptown Developments LLC at (810) 232-5555.



*Gov. Granholm and many other dignitaries were on hand for the groundbreaking event.*

## Housing Assistance Plan Changes Will Help Poorest Citizens

MSHDA has approved a plan to dedicate the state's largest housing subsidy source to Michigan's poorest citizens.

MSHDA's Streamlined Annual Public Housing Assistance (PHA) Plan for 2006-2007, a comprehensive explanation of the Authority's administration of the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program in Michigan (formerly known as Section 8), includes changes that allocate rental assistance to individuals living below the federal poverty level and create additional rental subsidies prioritized for Michigan's homeless.

"This year's plan demonstrates our commitment to helping the homeless and residents with the lowest incomes," Executive Director Michael DeVos said. "With this Streamlined Annual PHA plan, we will be able to assist those Michigan residents with the fewest housing options."

In the Housing Choice Voucher Program, MSHDA provides federal subsidies to help eligible individuals and families pay their rent.

There are two major changes in MSHDA's HCV program that are identified in the 2006-2007 PHA

*Continued on Page 5*

# Partners Building Communities

## Affordable Housing Conference Scheduled for June 5-7

**T**he Eighth Annual Michigan Conference on Affordable Housing is scheduled to take place at the Lansing Center on June 5-7, with an expected attendance of over 1,500 people representing developers, nonprofit groups, affordable housing advocates and homeless service providers.

The conference, the largest of its kind in the nation, has six educational tracks including Ending Homelessness, Homeownership, Creating and Preserving Multifamily Housing, Community Economic Development, Organizational Development, and Asset Management for Individuals and Families.

With a theme of "Partners Building Communities," the conference is intended to examine the growing need for affordable housing in Michigan.

In addition, the conference will feature keynote speaker Annette Simmons, a nationally acclaimed author and consultant (see story, page 5).

Twenty-seven statewide and federal organizations on the conference planning committee have contributed time, money, resources, and expertise over the past year to build a conference agenda designed to address affordable housing and homelessness issues.

"Our planning partners are committed to solving Michigan's affordable housing dilemma," MSHDA Executive Director Michael DeVos said. "This conference provides a rich environment for the exchange of ideas and innovative solutions."

Individuals or organizations interested in attending or receiving further information regarding affordable housing issues may visit the conference Web site at

[www.housingconference.org](http://www.housingconference.org).



*Conference attendees enjoyed exhibits and treats during a break at the 2005 conference.*

*Henry Cisneros, former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and co-author of Opportunity and Progress—A Bipartisan Platform for National Housing Policy, gave one of last year's keynote addresses.*



*The homelessness roundtable provided an opportunity for leaders in the industry to discuss the challenges of scarce resources.*



## MSHDA Joins Sponsors of New E-Magazine

MSHDA is one of many new sponsors on a weekly e-magazine in Detroit called Model D. MSHDA is in good company with partner sponsors including lenders, developers, architectural firms and other organizations interested in the subscribers of this popular, fast-growing new site.

Issue Media, owner and producer of community specific weekly e-magazines, is dedicated to the concept of creating an optimistic alternative narrative about the communities it profiles. The weekly e-magazine is rich with photos and stories that promote positive messages on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis. Because of the neighborhood and housing focus, the sponsorship



opportunity provides a good marketing match for the MSHDA initiative called Tipping Point Neighborhoods. This initiative directs development dollars into communities that are already showing signs of renewal in both market rate housing opportunities and small business vitality. By investing in developments in these areas, MSHDA expects to accelerate the revitalization of an area causing a positive effect on affordable housing production and community economic development.

For those wishing to view and subscribe to this weekly e-magazine visit [www.modeldmedia.com](http://www.modeldmedia.com). A similar site for the Grand Rapids area is expected to launch in April.

## Housing Assistance Plan Changes Will Help Poorest Citizens

*Continued from Page 3*

Plan. The first is to allocate 90 percent of the available vouchers to participants whose adjusted incomes are at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty level (currently \$20,000/year for a family of four) and 10% of new participants' adjusted income at or below 120 percent of the poverty level.

The second change allows for the use of HOME Tenant-Based Rental Assistance subsidies (TBRA) to move people rapidly from shelter to housing, utilizing a "Housing First" approach. The TBRA program will allow homeless individuals and families to obtain a subsidy similar to a voucher to help pay their rent for up to 24 months. During that 24-month period, the participants must be

willing to set goals toward self-sufficiency.

The program will create an additional 3,077 rental subsidies to assist Michigan's homeless. Participants must be actively engaged in services provided through a locally qualified and publicly supported service provider and must have continuously engaged in these services for an extended period of time (at least 28 days).

The plan has been submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for its review and approval. MSHDA anticipates the program changes will go into effect on August 1, 2006. To view the 2006 Federal Poverty Limits, visit: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/06poverty.shtml>.

## Conference Keynoter Will Discuss Connecting Through Storytelling



Annette Simmons

Annette Simmons is a behavioral science consultant and author of three books: *The Story Factor: Inspiration, Influence, and Persuasion through the Art of Storytelling* (Basic Books, 2002), *A Safe Place for Dangerous Truth: Using Dialogue to Overcome Fear & Distrust* (AMACOM, May 1999) and *Territorial Games: Understanding and Ending Turf Wars at Work* (AMACOM, 1997).

She is President of Group Process Consulting (Greensboro, NC) and combines public speaking, writing, consulting and constant research and development to serve organizations seeking to increase workgroup cooperation for bottom-line results. Simmons delivers keynote speeches, short interventions and training experiences that cause participants to rethink faulty assumptions that perpetuate faulty workplace behaviors. Clients include federal clients like NASA, IRS, NSA, large clients like IBM and Analog Devices as well as small privately held clients. Simmons has been featured on CNBC's Power Lunch, radio programs including NPR, and quoted in *Fortune*, *Working Woman*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *Washington Post*, and others.

*April 2006 • Building Blocks*



## MSHDA Really Can Make Dreams Come True

By Ashley Mead,  
Communications Coordinator

**F**or a number of years Benjamin Williams, a resident of Dearborn Heights, dreamed of owning his own home. As a renter, he was under the impression that he could not afford to buy a property or own a house. While browsing the State of Michigan Web site, Williams came across the Key to Own homeownership program within MSHDA's Office of Existing Housing. After inquiring, he was sent an information packet that included a checklist of steps that would lead him to homeownership.

"At first it was so confusing," said Williams. "I wasn't sure what I needed to do to purchase a home. But the people at MSHDA have been great. They have guided me through the whole process step-by-step."

Immediately, Williams began working with a realtor for a property in Dearborn Heights that was more financially achievable than the property he was currently renting through the Section 8 program. He sees now that the steps he went through to become a homeowner were simpler than he had anticipated.

Just a month later, Williams moved into his new home. Facing mental challenges, he was surprised that the process went so smoothly, and that his disability never turned into a problem. There was only one small setback that occurred during the inspection process.

"There were some insulation issues with the house, and I thought it was all falling apart," Williams said. "But MSHDA ended

up financing some of the home repairs through another program and I was able to move in after all."

Williams indicated that the Social Security payments he receives were not enough to pay for the insulation replacement and home repairs, leading him to believe that he would not be able to own a home after all.

The house Williams now owns is in Dearborn Heights and was recently renovated with all new kitchen and bathroom fixtures as well as new carpet and paint. A minimal amount of work needed to be done, other than to turn it from a house into a home. According to Williams, being part of the MSHDA programs has given him pride in being a homeowner and strengthened his hopes for the future.

"There are all kinds of things to do now that I own my own home," said Williams. "I had my first barbeque last week, and invited all my neighbors and family over to celebrate."

Williams was quick to point out his appreciation for all the assistance and guidance provided by the people and the programs at MSHDA. He feels as though he is more secure now that he owns his home and is not expected to make rental payments for the rest of his life. He is proud to be a homeowner, thanks in part to MSHDA.

"MSHDA really can make dreams come true," he said.

For more information on MSHDA initiatives and programs, visit the Web site at

[www.michigan.gov/mshda](http://www.michigan.gov/mshda).

## MSHDA Initiative Helps City of Detroit Fight Chronic Homelessness

**M**SHDA has recently developed the Chronic Homeless Initiative, allocating \$10 million targeted to the development of permanent supportive housing for individuals throughout Michigan who are chronically homeless. Along with partners such as the Corporation for Supportive Housing and other State of Michigan departments, MSHDA has awarded a number of cities throughout the state with a grant to help house the homeless in their community.

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**"The activities of the last few months have been the most exciting thing to take place in supportive housing for homeless for years."**

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Throughout Michigan, over 30,000 residents sleep in emergency shelters or on the streets each night. The chronic homeless comprises 15-20 percent of Michigan's homeless population while using 75 percent of the resources. A great majority of those are located within the city of Detroit. As such, MSHDA has awarded the city of Detroit with a \$3 million grant in hopes of providing safe, affordable housing for those in need.

*Continued on Page 8*

# Human Services Director Has Vision for Michigan

An Interview with Marianne Udow of the Michigan Department of Human Services



When Marianne Udow was appointed as Director of the Department of Human Services in January of 2004, she was clear that the agency was struggling with a huge lack of resources and a staff under stress, but she couldn't have known the scope of the job she would face. Now, just two years later Udow is reporting significant progress on all six of their strategic goals that were laid out in an inclusive planning process. The result is a Three Year Strategic Plan for DHS that Udow can recite almost without taking a breath. Addressing the biggest problems at DHS started with replacing antiquated information systems; implementing an early childhood initiative to ensure that all children have a great start in life; transforming the way DHS moves clients toward self-sufficiency; fundamentally reforming the child welfare system; implementing recommendations of two state-wide task forces on vulnerable adults, and expanding programs for

prevention and intervention by locating DHS workers in 39 schools around the state.

On top of her responsibilities at DHS, Marianne Udow serves as a MSHDA board member. She is also a co-leader with MSHDA Executive Director Michael DeVos on the Governor's new initiative called Cities of Promise. The initiative targets Michigan's most vulnerable cities with the highest poverty rates, and Udow and DeVos are engaging cabinet level leadership to create focused attention and priority from every state agency on the complex problems of these cities. "Well beyond the social service opportunities in Cities of Promise, our DHS local directors will bring to bear their talent, knowledge and commitment to these cities," said Udow. "These local directors all serve on the local human service collaboratives and are members of the community in the broadest sense, so they understand all of the needs. These local DHS directors will be an important part of the local leadership team as these Cities of Promise prioritize their most critical needs."

An even newer initiative that includes a partnership with DHS and MSHDA is the Campaign to End Homelessness in Ten Years. "Our partnership on ending homelessness in Michigan is being met in the field with incredible enthusiasm. Our field workers that have been frustrated for so long because of the chronic problem of homelessness now have hope. They believe that this campaign is the start towards creating a systemic and long term solution,"

*Continued on Page 8*

## MSHDA Staffer Named Director of New MSHDA Division



*Jackie Williams-Armstrong*

Jackie Williams-Armstrong, formerly Director of the Housing Resource Fund in MSHDA's Office of Community Development has been named Director of the Southeast Michigan Development Division and will be headquartered in MSHDA's Detroit office located in Cadillac Place.

Three more staff members will be hired soon, but already joining the team are Joanne Brown, Edwin Harlin and Pauline Millichamp. The purpose of the new division is to market MSHDA programs in Southeast Michigan, specifically in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb and Monroe counties.

"We are very excited about this new venture and intend to raise awareness of our programs and services to our customers and partners in Southeast Michigan," said Williams-Armstrong. "MSHDA has a lot to offer and by making more people aware, we can raise our production figures significantly while at the same time affording opportunity to lower income families in the four-county area."

Williams-Armstrong will be in the Lansing office one day a week and spend the remaining time in the Detroit office.



# MSHDA Initiative Helps City of Detroit Fight Chronic Homelessness

*Continued from Page 6*

A team has been assembled throughout the Detroit area to come up with a plan for working in their community. The team represents the continuum of care, the mental health industry and the 24-hour walk-in center NSO. There are also team members from the city of Detroit, the Corporation for Supportive Housing, the city of connect Detroit, Great Lakes Capital Fund and a number of other local partners who are involved in this planning process. This team is led by local agency Southwest Counseling Solutions who are pulling this initiative together creating an interface of external stakeholders.

## Human Services Director Has Vision for Michigan

*Continued from Page 7*

said Udow. "But, we will have to take the lead from communities that have already created a plan to end homelessness. These plans have to be wide-spread and far-reaching plans that include local business leaders."

When asked about her personal preferences and passions for her work Marianne Udow pointed to the DHS initiatives and programs that center around prevention, poverty reduction and early childhood development and care. She also celebrates the close partnership evolving between DHS and MSHDA, a partnership that is destined to bring each organization closer to realizing mission-driven objectives. *Prior to her post at DHS, Marianne Udow served as Senior Vice President of Health Care Products and Provider Services for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. Marianne is a passionate advocate for improving the lives of the poor with a special emphasis on children and early childhood development.*

According to Joe Tardella of Southwest Counseling and Development Services, the Chronic Homeless Initiative is the first of its kind and is proving to be an outstanding endeavor.

"The activities of the last few months have been the most exciting thing to take place in supportive housing for homeless for years," said Tardella. "There has never been an initiative with such momentum in the past."

The Detroit funding is being dispersed in such a way that will best benefit the homeless populations within the city. About \$2 million has been allocated for rental assistance programs and the remaining \$1 million will be used to assist in the development by Southwest non-profit housing which supports the construction of 100-150 units of permanent supportive housing.

"We are looking to provide housing, rental and support services to over 200 people in the next couple of years," said Tardella.

With the help of MSHDA and the Chronic Homeless Initiative, the city of Detroit appears to be well on its way to housing the local chronically homeless.



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